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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [PHUM](#) [BN](#)

SUBJECT: BENIN: MUSLIM INTELLECTUAL ASSOCIATION QUESTIONS THE
SECULARITY OF THE STATE

¶1. (U) The Association of Muslim Intellectuals petitioned the National Assembly on September 17 to express concern that the government uses state prerogatives for religious proselytizing. Citing Article 8 of the Constitution, which provides for equal access of citizens to health, culture, information and training, the Association denounced that equal access to the National Broadcasting Corporation (ORTB) is denied to Muslims, whereas ORTB abundantly broadcasts Christian programs and plays Christian songs even on non-religious days. The petition outlined that Christian events received heavy national media coverage to the detriment of the Muslims. The signees called for equal access of all religious groups to public media.

¶2. (U) The Association also cited "pernicious infiltration of religion into the corridors of power". It criticized the fact that the government gives Christian names to newly constructed public infrastructures. The petition also condemned the fact that citizens in military camps were forced to sing Christian songs during training for national service.

¶3. (U) 1437 people from all parts of the country signed the petition that was presented to deputies at a plenary session on September 22, and subsequently submitted to the National Assembly's Law Commission for consideration. The Association forwarded copies of the petition to other institutions including the President's Office, the High Authority for Media Regulation (HAAC), the Mediator of the Republic, and Human Rights organizations.

¶4. (U) According to the 2002 census, 27 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 24 percent Muslim and less than 10 percent represent other Christian affiliated religious groups including Evangelical, Protestant, Methodist and other related churches. Benin is praised for its religious tolerance and syncretism.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: A source informed Post that the Muslim Intellectual Association who initiated the petition is close to Habib Yaro, the Imam of the mosque of Zongo, an area in Cotonou that is home to Muslims from neighboring countries including Nigeria, Burkina Faso, and Niger. Imam Habib Yaro is influential but controversial because of his strong opinions regarding religious issues. Another source told Post that Halidou Lawal Daouda, a rich Muslim business man close to the opposition G13 and influential in the Muslim community, was also involved in the drafting of the petition. Post believes that the petition may reflect the opposition's wish to rally Muslim support for Abdoulaye Bio Tchane, a potential challenger of President Yayi in the 2011 presidential election. The petition is a clear criticism of evangelists' increasing influence in President Yayi's inner circle. END COMMENT

BOUSTANI